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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MEXICO 001961

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: EARLY RESULTS OF THE MEXICAN MIDTERM ELECTIONS:
PRI MAKES GAINS

REF: A. MEXICO 1667
[¶](#)B. MEXICO 604

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor James P. Merz.
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d).

[¶](#)11. (C) Summary. Early results of the July 5 midterm legislative and local elections indicate that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was the big winner and will supersede the ruling National Action Party (PAN) as the largest party in the 500 seat Chamber of Deputies. The final results will not be announced until July 8 but preliminary estimates of how the voting results will translate into congressional representation give the PRI some 233 seats, the PAN 146, and the PRD 72. The PRI also may end up with 5 of the 6 state governorships up for grabs. While the PAN, and particularly the PRD, are Sunday's losers, Mexican democracy and the electoral process were big winners given generally high marks for a well organized election, relatively free of significant violence or claims of fraud, with higher than expected voter participation. End Summary.

Federal Elections: Congressional Shake-up

[¶](#)12. (U) Early results of the midterm legislative and local elections indicate that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was the big winner on July 5 and will supersede the ruling National Action Party (PAN) as the largest party in the 500 seat Chamber of Deputies. With almost 98 percent of the results counted using the Federal Electoral Institute's (IFE) PREP quick count system, the PRI is ahead with 36.6 percent of the vote, the PAN second with 27.8 percent, and the Revolutionary Democratic Party a distant third with 12.3 percent. The Green Party of Mexico (PVEM) was the most successful of the small parties, pulling 6.5 percent. The only party to lose its registration was the Social Democratic Party, winning only 1 percent of the vote and missing the 2 percent threshold. The Worker's Party (PT), New Alliance (PANAL), and Convergencia all have held on, in Convergencia's case only by a .36 percent thread. Final results will likely be released on July 8, except in districts where the outcome is challenged in court.

[¶](#)13. (C) Estimates by pollsters of how the voting results will translate into congressional representation vary, with most approximations giving the PRI some 233 seats, the PAN 146, the PRD 72, and the PVEM 22 (a change from the Chamber's current composition of 207 seats controlled by the PAN, 127 by the PRD, 106 by the PRI, and 17 by the PVEM). Consulta

Mitofsky's projections based on exit polling and PREP results give the PRI upwards of 245 seats, but predicate such a win on the party securing some 40 percent of the popular vote, which seems less likely. Carlos Casillas of the Chamber's Center for Social and Public Opinion Research told Poloff on July 6 that he could see the PRI securing between 237 and 245 seats, with the PVEM safely winning 17 to 20. Despite these initial tabulations, the complicated calculations to determine each party's representation in the Chamber, including doling out the plurinominal seats, probably will not be concluded until next week and could last even longer depending on the number of electoral challenges and the length of their resolution.

¶4. (U) The PREP count puts the null vote at between 5 and 6 percent, higher than the historical norm of 2.5 and 3 percent, but still lower than earlier estimates of 10 to 12 percent. Null vote proponents are claiming victory with a "voto en blanco" tally in Mexico City that could reach upwards of 12 percent, but the low nationwide average confirms suspicions that the movement was largely the result of an elite debate that had little impact on the typical Mexican voter.

State Elections: Voters Look To PRI

¶5. (C) The PRI also came out on top in a number of key gubernatorial bids, wresting from the PAN control of San Luis Potosi and Queretaro, as well as depriving the party of the hard-fought Nuevo Leon governorship. Analysts speculated in

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the run-up to the vote that the San Luis Potosi contest could be more fraught for the PAN than expected -- PRI candidate Fernando Toranzo Fernandez was the current PAN Governor's Secretary of Health and had broad appeal to voters, even in the traditionally strong PAN state (ref a). Early projections indicate that the PRI will come out ahead. The PAN's defeat in Queretaro was a bigger surprise for most observers, who for the most part speculated that the party would safely hold onto what has been considered a PAN stronghold. Carlos Casillas noted that the PAN ran a relatively dismal campaign in the state, which, combined with the nationwide trend favoring the PRI and typical midterm ambivalence toward the ruling party, led to the unexpected loss. The PRI's Nuevo Leon victory was less of a shock. Although PRI candidate Rodrigo Medina de la Cruz was building a lead in the weeks prior to the vote, the PAN remained committed to winning back the seat in one of its traditional safe states until 2003. The PRI, as expected, also easily won Colima and Campeche, despite sketchy candidate selection decisions in Colima (ref a).

¶6. (C) The gubernatorial contest in Sonora is still too close to call, with both PRI candidate Alfonso Elias Serrano and PAN candidate Guillermo Padres Elias proclaiming victory. While a PAN win would be significant given the state's heavily PRI tendencies, it probably would offer but a small consolation to the party. Entering the campaign season with approval ratings for PRI Governor Eduardo Bours upwards of 80 percent, it is almost certain that the June daycare center fire in Hermosillo rather than profound rejection of the PRI can be blamed for jeopardizing the party's hold on power.

Atmospherics

¶7. (C) Overall, the elections appear to have been generally well-organized and produced only minimal and isolated incidents of violence. A dispute in Ecatepec, Mexico State, that produced the arrest of over 91 individuals and five injured was the worst incident reported. Press reports also say that twelve people from two families were killed on the way to vote in Guerrero State, but little additional information is known at this time. Embassy observation

teams, deployed out of Mexico City to the state of Mexico, Queretaro, and Oaxaca, as well as seven of our Consulates (Ciudad Juarez, Guadalajara, Hermosillo, Matamoros, Merida, Monterrey, and Tijuana) indicated that the elections were mostly well-organized and running smoothly. Most teams noted polls opened late and Hermosillo did document some irregularities, including PAN monitors helping voters to fill out their ballots at one station. IFE Counselor Francisco Guerrero told the Charge on July 5 that he was pleased with most reports indicating the polling had been peaceful and organized.

¶8. (C) Preliminary results also indicate that voter turnout was about 45 percent, despite earlier concerns that abstention could top 70 percent. Embassy observers noted that many voters appeared more engaged in the local elections, which probably boosted participation rates given the simultaneous local and federal elections in twelve states and Mexico City.

Comment: The Losers

¶9. (C) Despite an aggressive campaign and high levels of popular support for President Calderon, the PAN failed to win key governorships and the 168 federal deputy seats needed to sustain a presidential veto. While we do not expect to see the PRI become a purely obstructionist force in congress over the next three years, President Calderon and his party will be forced to negotiate with an emboldened PRI with its eye on the 2012 presidential race. Moreover, prospects are dim for any significant structural economic reforms in the remainder of this administration. The PRI will also have the upper hand in budget negotiations. Mexico's expenditure budget is passed only through the Chamber of Deputies and the President, meaning that the PRI will have significant leverage in managing budget resources and the PAN will be more constrained in its ability to counteract its opponent's

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attempts to use government funds for advantage in the 2012 presidential campaigns (ref b). Nevertheless, President Calderon graciously conceded on election night and announced his commitment to form agreements with other parties to advance Mexico's priorities. Calderon's ability to work with Congress will be an advantage to his legislative efforts given the more challenging new environment.

¶10. (C) PAN President German Martinez also lost big. Alleged orchestrator of the party's "dirty war" against the PRI, he will likely become the PAN's whipping boy, as the party seeks to cast blame for the losses. Sometimes mentioned as a potential presidential candidate in 2012, he may have difficulty recovering from the electoral blow, at least in the short term.

¶11. (C) The PRD was Sunday's biggest loser as the party fell from being the second largest Chamber force (127 seats) to the third (probably at some 72 seats with only 12.5 percent of the vote). The party's public squabbles and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's almost nationwide campaign on behalf of the PT-Convergencia alliance deeply wounded the PRD's campaign efforts and tarnished its image before voters. PRD President Jesus Ortega has already said the party will expel members who supported other parties in this election -- it appears that Lopez Obrador's tenure in the PRD is almost at an end.

Comment con't: The Winners

¶12. (C) Clearly, the PRI came out on top of the 2009 midterm and state elections, and the Mexican media is focused on the possibility that the party will work with the PVEM to form a congressional coalition to give the PRI a functional majority. While observers have noted that the small parties tend to lack the same kind of legislative discipline as their

larger colleagues, a PRI and PVEM coalition is not outside the realm of possibility depending on the final deputy count.

The PRI will be able to use its new position as the Chamber's largest party to more aggressively drive the congressional debate, but will still be constrained to a certain point by a Senate controlled by the PAN.

¶13. (C) Within the PRI, Mexico State Governor Enrique Pena Nieto will use the party's success in Mexico State as evidence that he is the most viable presidential candidate in 2012. Preliminary results indicate that the PRI won upwards of 75 percent of the federal deputy seats, up from about 50 percent, mostly at the expense of the PRD but also seizing key corridors from the PAN. Casillas credited Pena Nieto's popularity as a key factor for the PRI's success. PRI insiders had reported to Poloff that the midterm elections were considered a test to see if Pena Nieto has the electoral wherewithal to run a successful campaign, rally the PRI base, and win over new voters. It appears he does. PRI President Beatriz Paredes may also receive some kudos for the party's performance, despite earlier criticisms that she had been slow to respond to the PAN's dirty campaign and hurt the party's chance at an outright legislative majority.

¶14. (C) Mexican democracy also emerged a clear winner in this electoral contest. Most commentators described the elections as well run and relatively free of the kind of violence and organized corruption associated with previous Mexican elections in the past. IFE put together a well attended and technologically impressive "election night" press event akin to what U.S. embassies do overseas to celebrate our presidential elections. Massive screens throughout an auditorium showed returns as they came in from around the country, as diplomats and electoral officials from around the world, including the Balkans and Africa, milled around the room. Press interviewed officials and political analysts and real time information as the returns came in were transmitted by all major domestic and international television and radio stations. Furthermore, given the relative youth of Mexican democracy -- only nine years removed from the first transition in presidential authority -- these kinds of shifts in party power are taking on the appearance of being more expected, normal, and accepted, reflecting well on the country's democratic progress. It is also worth noting that more voters than expected turned out on Sunday, despite the

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country's security woes and economic crisis. Moreover, the vast majority of those who did go to the polls rejected calls to cast null ballots, suggesting that perhaps voters have not completely lost faith in elected leaders and their country's developing democratic system.

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